

GRADUATION MATTERS (Your Community) PLAN

There are four basic steps to becoming a Graduation Matters Montana school. Please feel free to use this basic GMM Plan Template to work with your GMM Team on the design and implementation of your GMM Plan. Please also refer to the [Graduation Matters Montana Tool Kit](#) for specific worksheets, templates and helpful information.

STEP 1: Start your own Graduation Matters Team Ensuring every student graduates from high school college and/or career ready is a task the entire community can participate in, from robust school-based efforts, to community organizations working with districts to strengthen student supports, to local businesses participating in career preparation and mentoring supports. See the GMM Tool Kit for examples of team members, and sample letters of invitation to join the team. At the school-level, see if an existing school-based team (MBI, School Improvement, District Leadership Team, etc) can be tapped to form the nucleus of the school's GMM effort. Some ideas of stakeholders include:

<hr/>	School Board Representative(s)
<hr/>	District Superintendent
<hr/>	High School Principal(s)
<hr/>	School counselor (s)
<hr/>	Teacher(s)
<hr/>	Parent(s)
<hr/>	Student(s)
<hr/>	Local community foundation representative(s)
<hr/>	Local business owner(s)
<hr/>	Local community leader(s)
<hr/>	Local community-based and/or non-profit organization(s)
<hr/>	Local service organization(s)
<hr/>	Other(s)

Convening the Team

See the *Graduation Matters Montana* website for helpful community meeting tools, located under *Resources*. At the first GMM meeting, you should: (1) share information about GMM as a statewide effort of locally-designed, locally-implemented efforts; (2) share data about your local community's dropout challenge; (3) build in time for participants to talk in small groups about what is working and what more can be done to address the challenges; and (4) identify next steps, which should include: designating a key point of contact in the school who will work with external partners; identifying what additional information the team needs to move forward with planning; and designate a regular meeting time and place.

STEP 2: Know Your Data If you haven't already, contact OPI for your district/school dropout and graduation data, which is available to you by grade, subpopulation, and three-year trend. At minimum, fill in the following table. Be prepared to share this with your GMM team, the media, and families – in order to generate momentum for your efforts, and in order to develop strategies that best meet your specific needs.

	2011		2010		2009	
School	Drop Out Count	Drop Out Rate	Drop Out Count	Drop Out Rate	Drop Out Count	Drop Out Rate

What other data do you have that will help the school and community get a better understanding of who and why students drop out of the local school district? Review the following list, and check what data you already have:

Source	Key data findings	Date of data	What does it tell you?
Youth Risk Behavior Survey			
My Voice Survey			
School surveys (include MBI data if available)			

Focus group results from students who drop out, and/or family members			
Other			

Once you've gathered available data Be prepared to sit with your GMM Team to discuss:

(1) What is the scope of the dropout problem? (2) Which students are at high risk of dropping out? (3) Why do individual students drop out? (4) When are students at risk of dropping out? (5) What more do you need to/want to know to fully understand why students drop out, and when they do? (6) What key insights do you derive from looking at your data, and how is that influencing the focus of your GMM plan?

STEP 3: Implement Specific Research-Based Strategies Most school districts and communities have programs already in place to support students graduating from high school, college- and career-ready. The key is to efficiently communicate to non-educators what current work is being done at the school, and then to discuss what more can be done through more robust partnerships, based on what's working locally and elsewhere in Montana, to address the dropout problem. A helpful first step is for the school to fill out the following inventory which can then be shared with other members of the GMM team. The inventory is also available in the GMM Tool Kit, and on the website under Resources.

The inventory provides an opportunity for community and businesses to see current school efforts, and to identify opportunities to build on effective practices, and/or help to establish new efforts. Once the GMM team has identified its primary areas of interest in expansion or exploration, identify next steps in terms of needed research, resources, and key partnerships that will be needed to implement the plan.

Comprehensive Community Solutions – Take Inventory of “What Is”

The inventory below is modified from America’s Promise Grad Nation Guidebook. It is a comprehensive inventory to analyze the school district’s use of many of the most effective research-based strategies that school districts across the nation are employing to lower their dropout rates. The “Community Partnership Opportunity” column can be used by the GMM team to identify what community programs are in place/can be created to support the school’s efforts.

Current School Efforts	In Place	Not in Place	In Place & Needs Work	Community Partnership Opportunity
1. School policies do not unintentionally “encourage” students to drop out				
1a. School attendance policies identify and respond to students who are absent or tardy				
1b. Students who are credit deficient are identified early on & supported in credit recovery efforts				
1c. Identify other policies to share				
2. The school offers a college-and career-ready curriculum				
2a. All high school students have taken the MT Career Information Systems survey, or similar tool to identify career interests				
2b. The school provides college-level, dual enrollment and Advanced Placement courses to all students				
2c. Students are able to receive credit for internships, job shadowing and other career experiences				
2d. Local businesses regularly work with the school on career-oriented curriculum, including participating in Big Sky Pathways, and on-site job opportunities for students				
2e. The school is incorporating common core standards and STEM into its curricula				
2f. Service-learning and other hands-on instruction is incorporated into curricula				
2g. Identify other initiatives/policies to share				

Current School Efforts, cont.	In Place	Not in Place	In Place & Needs Work	Community Partnership Opportunity
3. The school has a multi-tiered dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery system				
3a. The school uses an early warning system to identify students at risk of dropping out				
3b. The school has a system for making sure all students are on-time with credits				
3c. The school has a MT Behavioral Initiative team that supports a positive support and recognition system				
3d. The school has a transitional support system to help students cross from middle grades into high school				
3e. The school has transitional support systems to help students cross successfully into college and careers				
3f. Identify other interventions to share				
4. The school employs effective student support systems				
4a. The school has Response to Intervention, or another system to target support for students' differing needs				
4b. School supports are supplemented by the work of community adults as mentors and tutors				
4c. School supports are supplemented by the work of community organizations who help families meet their basic needs				
4d. The school is organized into smaller academies and teams within larger school				
4e. The school has active engagement of parents and the community				
4f. The school had adequate staff- and teacher-to-student ratios to address the needs of the most struggling students				

STEP 4: Build Public Support and Keep the Community Informed and Involved

A critical component of a local Graduation Matters initiative is regular, robust communication within your community about the initiative. GMM is built on a belief that everyone has a role to play in keeping students engaged and committed to graduating, and people need to know about the initiative and the opportunities to participate in order to join in (see the GMM Toolkit and/or website for downloadable one-page handouts on how Students, Families, Educators, and Communities/Businesses can get involved). Current GMM initiatives, such as in Missoula, have discovered the value of broadly communicating the GMM message and expectations; as one Graduation Matters Missoula team member stated, "I now feel like it's partly my responsibility to ask a student why they're not in school if I see them downtown during the school day."

The Office of Public Instruction can provide you with GMM posters, Toolkits, I Pledge to Graduate cards, GMM wristbands, and other helpful materials to help you get the word out about your initiative. Contact us at graduationmatters@mt.gov if you would like GMM materials.

The GMM Toolkit has ideas for raising public awareness of your efforts, as well as a sample press conference invitation, sample media advisory and sample letter to the editor. Use this basic timeline template, or one of your own, to plan your communications effort. Make sure there are regular efforts to engage the local media and community organizations so the momentum continues to build for your good work.

Helpful considerations when planning regular communications include having your GMM team:

- (1) Identify spokespeople for the local GMM effort; consider school leadership, community leadership, student leadership
- (2) Create a list of key media outlets, including print, radio and television, if appropriate
- (3) Create a list of civic organizations and a meeting calendar to ensure someone presents on GMM work regularly

Communication Activity	1 st Quarter	2 nd Quarter	3 rd Quarter	4 th Quarter
(Ex: GMM launch; I Pledge event)				